Explaining the under representation of women in top management positions

KIM, So Won

Abstract

The number of women who have reached top management positions in the corporate world is significantly lower than their male counterparts. Three perspectives intend to explain the under representation of women in management positions. First, the person centered perspective analyses the individual in relation to the requirements for management positions; and explains that women's lack of managerial traits, competence and career aspirations are the main reasons for their slow advancement. The organization centered perspective examines how organizational practices and group dynamics may contribute to disadvantage women. The institutional perspective focuses on the impacts of societal and/or cultural values on the organization's perception of managerial women. Independent to the reasons of women's under representation in top management positions, organizations are increasingly aware of the need to attract and retain talent. In view of that organizations implement initiatives which may favour women's advancement.

Reference

KIM, So Won. Explaining the under representation of women in top management positions. 2007
FACULTE DES SCIENCES ECONOMIQUES ET SOCIALES
HAUTES ETUDES COMMERCIALES

EXPLAINING THE UNDER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN TOP MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Sowon KIM
EXPLAINING THE UNDER REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN TOP MANAGEMENT POSITIONS

Sowon Kim*

HEC, University of Geneva, Switzerland

* Address correspondence to Sowon Kim, HEC – Management Studies, 40 Blvd Pont d’Arve, 1211 Geneva 4, Switzerland. Email: Sowon.Kim@hec.unige.ch
Abstract

The number of women who have reached top management positions in the corporate world is significantly lower than their male counterparts. Three perspectives intend to explain the under representation of women in management positions. First, the person centered perspective analyses the individual in relation to the requirements for management positions; and explains that women’s lack of managerial traits, competence and career aspirations are the main reasons for their slow advancement. The organization centered perspective examines how organizational practices and group dynamics may contribute to disadvantage women. The institutional perspective focuses on the impacts of societal and/or cultural values on the organization’s perception of managerial women. Independent to the reasons of women’s under representation in top management positions, organizations are increasingly aware of the need to attract and retain talent. In view of that organizations implement initiatives which may favour women’s advancement.

Key words: women in management, career advancement, perception, networks, mentors
INTRODUCTION

Since the emergence of the woman manager over three decades ago, women’s participation in the corporate world has increased progressively. Today, women represent around 40% of the global workforce (ILO, 2004)\(^1\) and has accounted for 15.5% of labor growth from 1990–2000 (Fullerton & Toossi, 2001). Women have achieved virtual parity with men when entering organizations, but their careers start to lag behind to those of their male counterparts within five to six years (Catalyst, 1998). As such, women represent 20% of managerial positions (public, private and legislative) worldwide and only 1-5% of top executive positions (Wirth, 2001). For example in Fortune 500, 9.4% of U.S. women hold higher positions than vice president, there are 15.6% U.S. female corporate officers (i.e. executives who are board-elect or board appointed), 14.6% U.S. women board members and 12% of these companies still have no women directors\(^2\) (Catalyst, 2007).

Similar figures have appeared in other studies. Female executives in Fortune 100 accounted for 11% in 2001 (Capelli & Hamori, 2005). Furthermore, women executives represented 7.34% in a study of the largest 1000 companies during the period 1990–2003 (Hillman, Shropshire, & Cannella, 2005). However, only 13 out of Fortune 500 and 25 out of Fortune 1000 companies are led by women (Fortune, 2007). The pyramidal representation may be a reflection of women’s career progression.

\(^{1}\) The percentage corresponds to 70% of women in developed countries and 60% of women in developing countries.
\(^{2}\) 71% has 1-2 women directors and 17% has 3 or more directors.
In literature, three main perspectives intend to explain the under representation of women in top management positions: the person centered perspective, the organization centered perspective and the institutional perspective (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Fagenson, 1985, 1990, 1993; Tharenou, 1997, 1998). The person centered perspective analyses the individual in relation to the requirements for management positions. It explains that women’s lack of managerial traits, competence and career aspirations are the main reasons for their slow advancement. The organization centered perspective examines how organizational practices (i.e. performance evaluations and training) and group dynamics (e.g. networks) may contribute to disadvantage women as they have fewer opportunities to move up and less power which implies limited access to information and resources. The institutional perspective focuses on the impact of societal and/or cultural values on the organization’s perception of women in top management positions.

Considering each perspective independently may have limitations in explaining the reasons for low representation of women in top management positions. Therefore, women’s slow advancement may be better understood through the interaction of the person, the organization and the social and institutional context (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Fagenson, 1985, 1990, 1993; Tharenou, 1997, 1998). For example, stereotypes of individuals may be enforced by organizational practices embedded in a social and institutional context with specific characteristics (deriving from e.g. cultural values, histories, ideologies) which influence both the person and the organization (Ragins & Sundstrom 1989). Furthermore, social-system factors (e.g. socialization based on gender-roles and stereotypes) may influence the choice of industries of individuals before entry into an organization.

We further examine the three perspectives.
PERSON CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

The person centered perspective explains that women are under represented in top management positions because of their lack of managerial traits, competence and career aspirations.

Women and managerial traits

Managerial traits have been largely identified with male traits -- dominant, achievement-oriented, ambitious, aggressive, self-confident and rational. Female traits in contrast have been associated with being affectionate, emotional, friendly, mild, sensitive, and warm (Bem, 1974)\textsuperscript{3}. Although the reasons of the differences remain under debate\textsuperscript{4}, by and large these stereotyped traits, which also apply across different cultures, still prevail (Catalyst, 2006; Schneider, 2005). Therefore, women managers may have more difficulties in making it to the top because male and female stereotypes have been exported into the managerial arena and consequently women are perceived as being inadequately fit for the role of a manager (Catalyst, 2006; Green & Cassell, 1996; Schein 1973, 1975; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). Indeed, women managers who display male traits are criticized for not behaving femininely enough; yet, those who display feminine traits are criticized as not being assertive enough to be good managers (Antonakis, et al. 2005; Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsy, 1992; Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991). Accordingly, women may need to juggle

\textsuperscript{3} The Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) is a widely used self-report measure of perceptions on gender roles. BSRI was developed in the 1970s from the ranking results on desirable traits of men and women by 200 Stanford University undergraduates (most white and middle classed). The test includes 60 descriptive adjectives from which one third are masculine, one third are feminine, and the other third are neutral traits.

\textsuperscript{4} On the one side, evolutionary psychologists argue that men and women differ because of their innate biological predispositions, thus men and women are born different (Buss, 1995). On the other side, it is argued that men and women are different because of the tendency to occupy different social roles and socialization (Eagley & Wood, 1999).
and display different traits at different stages in their careers. They may first need to display more male traits until their credibility is relatively well established, and then they may need to display more feminine traits in order to avoid criticism related to their gender as successful women are more likely to be targets of more interpersonal hostility due to gender stereotypes (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs, & Tamkins, 2004).

Women in leadership positions also face similar challenges by being obstructed with sex-typed images of leadership (Schein, 2001). As such, women may adopt a distinct leadership style in order to overcome the female-role versus leader-role perception (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmid, 2001; Eagly & Johnson, 1990). A meta-analysis study on leadership styles confirm that female leaders are slightly more transformational (e.g. inspire followers and nurture their ability to contribute to organization) than male leaders (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmid, & Engen, 2003). However, women’s challenge may not be in developing an effective leadership style as all aspects of leadership style in which women surpass men are related positively to leader’s effectiveness (Eagly et al., 2003). Their challenge is more likely to be in legitimizing their style of leadership. This may not be surprising given that women who defy social rules of the situation and attempt to assert their authority in the absence of external validation are likely to meet with social disapproval (Ridgeway, 2001) and backlash (Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Women, line experience and competence

The second argument to explain women’s under representation in top management positions is their lack of line experience and competences to do the job.

A comparative study on viewpoints between CEOs and women managers shows that 68% of CEOs attribute lack of general management or line experience as being the number one reason of barrier for women’s career advancement (Catalyst, 2003). However, women
attribute 47% to the same reason. Whereas women do acknowledge lack of line experience, the argument is different. Their lack of line experience is more likely a result of organizations’ unwillingness to offer positions of responsibility rather than a cause of slow advancement.

One of the reasons that women are less entrusted with difficult tasks may be related with perceptions of female competence as being less competent than their male counterparts (Heilman, Lucas, & Block, 1992; Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992). Three experimental studies found that women are rated less competent, less influential and less likely to play a leadership role in team tasks unless information about individual performance, task structure, and prior work competence are provided (Heilman & Haynes, 2005). As such, women may need to continuously outperform in order to prove themselves with regard to their male superiors, peers and subordinates (Catalyst, 2003; ILO, 2004). Indeed, studies on women in executive positions have found the pressure for women to constantly outperform their male colleagues (Duffy, Fox, Punnett, Gregory, Lituchy, Moserrat, Olivas-Luján, Bastos, & Miller, 2006; Mainero, 1994).

Women and career aspirations

The third argument to explain women’s low representation in top management positions is their lack of career aspiration or ambition (Eddleston, Baldridge, & Veiga, 2004). There is an assumption that women are less ambitious than men (Maddok & Parkin, 1993; Van Vianen & Fischer, 2002). It is uncertain whether women are less ambitious because they have a tendency to downplay their ambitions due to societal expectations or because they are born with low levels of power needs (Fels, 2004; Rainey & Borders, 1997; Veroff, McClelland, & Ruhland, 1975). However, research on women and power states otherwise; some studies show women have higher power needs than men (Chusmir, 1985) and others
show that men and women have equal power needs (Cook & Mendleson, 1980; Harlan & Weiss, 1980; Van Wagner & Swanson, 1979). Inconsistency in findings may be the result of having overlooked at how power is differently defined by men and women; for men, power has a “control over” connotation; for women power is defined as influence (Groshev, 2002). It is therefore hard to conclude that women have less career aspirations than men. In fact, a study of more than 900 senior-level men and women from Fortune 1000 companies found that both have equal desires to have the CEO job (Catalyst, 2004a).

The person centered perspective is useful in understanding how differences that may exist between men and women may have become the source of stereotyped male and female traits which have been exported to the managerial arena. However, this perspective is weak in explaining why regardless of the lack of evidence of different levels of competence, ambition and management styles women are still under represented in top management positions.

ORGANIZATION CENTERED PERSPECTIVE

At the time when most studies on women’s slow advancement were justified by their lack of appropriate characteristics such as masculinity and/or human capital such as education and work experience, Kanter (1977) brought forward situational factors as being the main contributor to constraining women’s career progression. Her proposal -- women’s limited access to informal male-dominated networks which may serve as critical channels of information -- is one of the obstacles for women’s advancement, has been supported by other studies (Brass, 1985; Davies-Netzley, 1998; Ibarra, 1995; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989; Metz & Tharenou, 2001).
Thus, we turn to organizations and examine how managerial practices and group dynamics may impact the advancement of women’s careers as organizations are not genderless entities (Adler & Izraeli, 1994; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001).

**Women and performance evaluations**

Performance evaluations are important in that they play a key role in decisions of promotions and thus, managerial advancement. However, given the political nature of organizations (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Ferris & Buckley, 1990; Pfeffer, 1992), political processes may affect human judgment i.e. performance evaluations and promotions, and therefore career progression (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992; Wayne & Liden, 1995 Ferris & Buckly, 1990; Ferris, Fedor, & King, 1994; Judge & Bretz, 1994; McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2003). Furthermore, stereotypes and other biases often influence ratings (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, & McKellin, 1993). Although there is no consistency in research whether gender affect performance appraisals (Alimo-Metcalfe, 1994; Lyness & Heilman, 2006; Shore & Tashchian, 2003; Thacker & Wayne, 1995; Wexley & Pulakos, 1982), there is evidence that women are more likely to be rated lower in male-typed jobs (Landy & Farr, 1980). On the other hand, women may be overrated when they exceed in powerful, male stereotyped jobs as success has not been expected from them (Nieva & Gutek, 1981).

**Women, training and development**

Research shows that training and development programs benefit employees by increasing their skills (Gritz, 1993), salary (Mangum, Mangum, & Hansen, 1990; Arulampalam & Booth, 2001), and career advancement (Tharenou, 1997, 1994). A study of gender comparison in training participation shows that there are no differences between men and women (Arulampalam, Booth, & Bryan, 2004). In fact, more than gender *per se*, it is
work status that impacts the amount of training received (Arulampalam & Booth, 1998). Hence, individuals that have full-time contracts receive more training than those with fixed or temporary contract. Men with temporary contracts are more penalized than women by getting less training; however, women are more penalized than men by getting less training in part-time jobs. Given that women largely fill in part-time jobs mainly due to family demands (Euwals & Hogerbrugge, 2006), women are less trained than their male counterparts due to their work status.

**Women, networks and tokenism**

Research has shown that networks advance careers (Arthur, Claman, & DeFillippi, 1995; Burke & McKeen 1990; De Janasz, Sullivan, & Whiting, 2003; Gould & Penley, 1984; Jansen & Vinkenburg, 2006; Metz & Tharenou, 2001; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Ragins, 1989; Ragins & Cotton; Seibert, Kraimer, & Liden, 2001; Singh, Kumra, & Vinnicombe, 2002; Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). Therefore being part of networks is fundamental for career progression. Powerful networks are more likely to be male-dominated as top management positions are mostly populated by men. Women, therefore, have difficulties accessing to these networks not only because of the existing stereotypes on women but also because of their “outsider”/outgroup (being female) status.

Ingroup/outgroup distinction emerges from social categorization of the self and others, wherein being a member of a group is defined by the subjective perception of the self as a member of a specific category (Tajfel, 1982). Therefore, when individuals assimilate the self and others into ingroup/outgroup prototypes, depersonalization -- process in which an individual is no longer considered as an individual but a category -- happens (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1985). As such, the presence of an outgroup member in ingroup circles may lead to intergroup polarization (“we” versus “they”) when both groups interact and compete
for limited resources. As such, ingroup cohesion increases under perceived threat from outgroup (Dackert, Jackson, Brenner, & Johansson, 2003). Furthermore, the presence of an outgroup member in ingroup circles may lead to tokenism (representatives of their minority status) (Kanter, 1977). Given their outgroup status, tokens may have a complying attitude and may adopt particular behaviors such as conflict and risk avoidance, low participation in group discussions and therefore, difficulties of integration within the group.

Women and homophilious practices

Ingroup members are more likely maintain a strong group identity (“we”) through homophilious\(^5\) practices involving specific mechanisms of recruitment, socialization, and inclusion/exclusion behaviours. Homophily may give ground to exclusion and segregation on the basis of dissimilarity (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), although it may also induce to positive outcomes such as friendship, advice, support, and sharing of information between similar members (Krackhardt, 1992; Ibarra, 1993). Homophilious ties, however, are not impermeable. They can be overridden when organizations promote development of cross category relationships (Bacharach, Bamberger, & Vashidi, 2005; Polzer, Milton, & Swann 2002), individuals have experience interacting with those who are different from themselves (Westphal & Milton, 2000), possess specialized skills, or have strong mentors (Roth, 2004) defined as individuals who can provide career support (e.g. information and resources, challenging assignments, visibility/exposure) and/or psychosocial support (e.g. acceptance, confirmation, and friendship) (Kram, 1983; Noe, 1988; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Furthermore, mentors can legitimize an outsider’s status through mentors’ own ingroup status and influence (Burt, 1998). Having an ingroup “friend”, therefore, may relate to greater acceptance of outgroup members (Pettigrew, 1997). Accordingly, it may be crucial for women to have

---

\(^5\) Homophily refers to the tendency to prefer similar others (Lazarfeld & Merton, 1954).
powerful individuals who endorse their careers and facilitate the integration into the male-dominated networks. In fact, research has shown women to more likely benefit from mentors than men (Johnson & Scandura, 1994; Ragins & Scandura, 1994; Tharenou, 2005).

The organization centred perspective sheds us light into how organizations may contribute to disadvantage women. However, research in managerial practices remain rather inconsistent as some studies show that there are no differences between how men and women are evaluated and others provide evidence of discrimination against women. Research, however, is consistent of the importance of networks and mentors in women’s career advancement.

INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The institutional perspective focuses on the existing a priori of a societal or cultural impacts on the organization’s perception of women in top management positions. Organizations are located in societies with particular cultural values, institutional practices, ideologies and stereotypes regarding appropriate sex-roles and behaviors which affect its internal structures and processes (Martin et al., 1983). As such, social-system factors (e.g. sex-role socialization, gender-roles and stereotypes, role-conflict) are influencing factors of occupational choices before entry into a specific organization (Ragins & Sundstrom, 1989). Accordingly, men are still more likely to be in manufacturing industries and women in service sectors (Helfat, Harris, & Wolfson, 2006). Likewise, maternity laws and affirmative action laws for women’s equality at workplace can influence the way women are treated and viewed as organizational members (Fagenson, 1990). Although the purpose of affirmative action laws
is to reduce discrimination against women at work, it often is a subject of controversy and resentment. Those who do not profit from such laws may label such actions as “reverse discrimination” (Heilman, 1996). Moreover, when affirmative action laws take the form of preferential selection, female beneficiaries not only perceive themselves as being judged by others as less competent, but also put their competence in question (Heilman & Alcott, 2001).

Summary of the three perspectives

The three perspectives intend to explain the under representation of women in top management positions. A biased perception on the female manager seems to underline the person centered perspective as despite the lack of empirical evidence, this approach supports women to be short of the qualifications needed for top managerial positions. In contrast, the organization centered perspective assumes that organizations are not gender neutral and therefore, its formal managerial practices and informal group dynamics disadvantage women. Although the institutional perspective has been researched to a less extent as compared to the first two views, it underlines how the context further strengthens the biased perception of women in top management positions. Given the business case of diversity being profitable for companies, the growing awareness of the need to attract and retain talent, organizations increasingly implement formal initiatives which may favour women’s advancement.

ADVANCING WOMEN’S CAREERS

Although women managers seem to be disadvantaged in contrast to their male counterparts due to biased perceptions, intergroup dynamics and the institutional context, an increasing number of organizations take action to advance women’s careers for several reasons. First, there is growing acceptance that diversity is good for the company (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Richard, 2000). According to Cox and Blake (1991), diversity enhances the
competitive advantage (e.g. greater sensitivity to local markets, better problem-solving approach, and more creativity) of the organization. However, the diversity-performance connection has been mixed (Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). Dwyer and colleagues (Dwyer, Orland, & Ken, 2003) found that gender diversity’s impact on performance is dependent on the organizational context it resides. In other words, a positive association exists between diversity and firm performance for those companies which seek growth. Further, a study of 353 companies of Fortune 500 (1996-2000) has shown a positive correlation between the number of women in top management and financial performance although the relation has not been firmly established (Catalyst, 2004b). According to this study, companies with highest representation of women in their top management team experience better financial performance e.g. 35.1% higher Return On Equity (ROE) and a 34.0% Total Return to Shareholders (TRS).

Second, companies accelerate their initiatives in advancing women’s careers in order to manage their talent. In fact, more and more organizations implement organizational impression management strategies at their recruitment phase in order to attract more women and racial minorities because of their awareness in the changing demographics of the world, and tightening labor market (Avery & McKay, 2006). Organizations attempt not only to recruit the best, but also to retain the best in a progressively competitive world where talent drain has recently become an increasing phenomenon. Gradually, more women leave the corporate world to start their own business (Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Mattis, 2004; Winn, 2004). For example, the rate of growth in women-owned business from 1975 to 1990 doubled compared to that of men in the American society (Moore & Buttner, 1997). As such, one in ten women over the age of 35 is self-employed and is more likely to have held corporate positions.

---

6 Organizational impression management (OIM) applies the individual level impression management to the organizational level. It refers to "any action purposefully designed and carried out to influence an audience’s perceptions of an organization" (Elsbach, Sutton & Principe, 1998: 68)
Women leave the corporate world because they are either “pulled” towards a business idea or “pushed” by frustrating corporate practices. Those “pulled” are attracted towards the idea of creating something uniquely their own, of autonomy, of self-sufficiency, and/or taking advantage of a niche market. 24% of women who become entrepreneurs are due to the lucrative market niche (Fortune, 2004). On the other hand, those “pushed” become entrepreneurs because they are frustrated with the corporate world given its unbreakable “glass ceiling”7 and “glass walls”8. Amongst the reasons, over 90% is attributed to the glass ceiling experience and need to have more control over one’s own time schedule (Fortune, 2004). This view is supported by Mattis (2004) who found that the four most frequently cited reasons to become an independent are: dissatisfaction with the work environment, glass ceiling factors, lack of challenges in the job and the need for more flexibility (i.e. control over the hours). Indeed, women with greater family responsibilities opt more for self-employment as a strategy to balance work and family life (Wellington, 2006). However, although the self-employed enjoy greater autonomy, schedule flexibility, higher levels of job involvement and job satisfaction than those employed in organizations, it does not always diminish the work-family conflict. Parasuraman and Simmers (2001) found that self-employed individuals experience higher levels of work-family conflict, and lower family satisfaction than organizational employees.

The outflow of highly qualified women from the corporate world has been coined as the “opt-out revolution” (Belkin, 2003). Women voluntarily exit the corporate race due to difficulties in balancing work and non-work demands causing a female talent drain phenomenon. A study of women opting-out showed that nearly four in ten highly qualified women (37%) dropped out as opposed to 24% for men (Hewlett & Buck Luce, 2005). The

---

7 “Glass ceiling” is a term coined by Wall Street Journal in 1985 to describe an artificial barrier to the advancement of women into most senior management positions in Corporate America.
8 “Glass walls” is a term coined to describe the functional segregation that prevents women to obtain line and general management experience.
percentage rose to 43% for women with children. The talent drain is not to be overlooked if organizations want remain ahead by retaining the best in a growing global competitive environment (Adler, Brody, & Osland, 2000). Further, retaining the best may not only impact the organization by having the best on their side, but also by attracting new talent (i.e. women) easier.

In order to retain highly talented women, companies commit to the advancement of women’s careers by adopting different initiatives. On a study of successful intervention methods, McCarthy and colleagues (McCarty, Hukai, & McCarty, 2005) identify seven initiatives: holding managers accountable for progress on diversity metrics, providing training about diversity (and associated attitudes and behaviors), identifying and developing high potential talent, implementing networking and mentoring programs, making a business case, supporting work-life balance programs, and implementing a sense of social responsibility and distributive justice in the organization. We develop hereafter work-life balance programs as well as networking/mentoring programs as they have been identified by women as the most important although not exclusive criteria to advance (Marlow, Marlow, & Arnold, 1995). Thus, it seems critical for companies to implement initiatives which assist women to better balance professional and private life and help increase women’s visibility through networks and mentors. Research is consistent in that family is negatively correlated but networking and mentoring are positively correlated to women’s career progress.

**Gaining flexibility: work-life balance programs**

As women are most responsible for childcare and household tasks (Shelton & John, 1996; Hyman & Summers, 2004) and are unwilling to give up family life for a career (Hewlett, 2002), women are the ones who face particularly strong work-family conflicts
A meta-analysis study on the relationship between work-family conflict and satisfaction with job and life confirmed the consistent negative relationship between the two (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998). Hence, work-life balance programs are adopted by organizations to facilitate individuals to manage the interface between their paid work and other important life activities (Lobel & Kossek, 1995). Work-life balance programs include specific services such as on-site day care for children or emergency daycare, flexible working hours and parental leave. According to research, such programs enhance recruitment and reduce absenteeism and turnover (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999; Lobel, 1999). Thus, it is a way for organizations to recruit and retain employees by providing them with flexibility and resources in order to help them combine work and family life more easily. In fact organizations employing larger percentages of women are the ones which achieve more productivity gains from such programs (Konrad & Mangel, 2000).

Women’s need to juggle between family life and career reflect in their career path. Unlike the traditional linear careers of men, women’s careers have been characterized by various career interruptions due to attention to non-work needs (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Women’s definition of success comprises both personal achievement and personal relationships (Powell & Mainiero, 1992), and therefore they tend to consider about career options after reflecting first on its impact on others (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005). Following this reasoning, women’s career pattern is metaphorically described as a kaleidoscope -- women position their roles according to their relationships and then manage their careers accordingly. In contrast, men’s career pattern is more likely to be linear as their career options are more goal-oriented and independent from the context (Powell & Mainiero, 1992).

---

9 A study has focused on the work-family enrichment perspective which focuses on how the roles of work and family could benefit from each other rather than being conflicting (Greenhaus and Powell, 2006). However, the perspective remains a theoretical one and no empirical study has proven the positive relationship yet.

10 The "kaleidoscope model" first cited by one of the authors in 1996.
Stroh and colleagues (Stroh, Brett, & Reilly, 1992) found that among Fortune 500, women executives who have successfully followed an upward mobility tend to be more single and without children as compared to their male peers. Other studies confirm that women compared to men are likely to experience more career interruptions, are less likely to be married, and have fewer children (Kirchmeyer, 2002; Schneer & Reitman, 1990; Tharenou, Latimer, & Conroy, 1994). The reason may be attributed to the fact that children slow down women’s career progression (Eddleston, Baldridge, & Veiga, 2003; Friedman & Greenhaus 2000; Kirchmeyer, 2006, 2002; Tharenou et al., 1994). This is partially due to the perception that women are seen as less committed to their careers due to non-work demands (Blau, Ferber, & Winkler, 1998; Powell & Mainiero, 1992) whereas men are perceived to be the main provider.\footnote{In fact, men with traditional family model (working husband, non-working spouse with children) advance most in their careers and enjoy faster promotions, as well as more bonuses (e.g. marital and parental); those who advance least are childless male and female singles.} Furthermore, a comparative study of career path and career progression of men and women in management occupations reveals that women are more likely than men to stay within one organization, to have made more moves as a result of being promoted within that organization and are more likely to pursue the traditional career paths of men. (Ackha & Heaton, 2004). Thus, we can deduce that women who want to advance hierarchically may need to follow the dominant male career path (Eddleston et al., 2004; Kirshmeyer, 2002; Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005; Mallon & Cohen, 2001; Powell & Mainiero, 1992; Schneer & Reitman, 2002; Valcour & Tolbert, 2003).
Breaking the glass ceiling through networking and mentoring

No organization is free from organizational politics (Pfeffer, 1992) therefore political processes may affect human judgment and thus, career progression (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992; Wayne & Liden, 1995 Ferris & Buckly, 1990; Ferris, Fedor, & King, 1994; Judge & Bretz, 1994; McFarland, Ryan, & Kriska, 2003). Accordingly, knowing “who” may be as important as knowing “what” because having access to and being supported by people with power or influence is crucial for career advancement.

In order to have access to powerful or influential individuals of the organization, individuals need to network. In fact, networks are one the key determinants of career advancement (Arthur, et al.,1995; De Janasz, et al., 2003; Gould & Penley, 1984; Jansen & Vinkenburg, 2006; Metz & Tharenou, 2001; Podolny & Baron, 1997; Seibert, et al., 2001; Singh et al., 2002). Therefore, networking may be a critical strategy for career progression. Broadly defined, networking is the building and nurturing of personal and professional relationships to create a system of information, contact, and support which altogether is crucial for career and personal success (Whiting & De Janasz, 2004). Networking include behaviors such as maintaining contacts, socializing, engaging in professional activities, participating in communities, and increasing internal visibility; however, only increasing internal visibility was positively related to career advancement (Forret & Dougherty, 2001; 2004)

Through networking individuals may also meet potential mentors who can assist career advancement (Burke & McKeen 1990; Ragins, 1989; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Wanberg, et al., 2003). However, having mentors may not always be beneficial as the mentoring relationship may also trigger negative consequences if mentors manipulate and/or

---

12 Other studies on the determinants of career advancement have focused on demographics (e.g. race, gender) (Greenhaus et al., 1990), personality traits (e.g. extroversion) (Crant, 2000; Judge et al., 1999; Seiber & Kramer, 2001), and family status of the individual (Eddleston, Baldridge, & Veiga, 2004; Judge & Bretz, 1994; Kirchmeyer, 2006; Tharenou et al., 1994).
adopts a neglecting behavior with regard to individuals they mentor (Eby & McManus, 2004). Moreover, if mentors are disconnected to influential people in the organization, it can be detrimental or not very useful for individuals (Podolny & Baron, 1997).

Given the acknowledged importance of interpersonal relationships in advancing careers, organizations have taken the initiative to implement formal networking and mentoring programs for women. An increasing number of organizations have internal women’s networks and formal mentoring agendas. However, there is little empirical research regarding the effectiveness of these networks and programs. Furthermore, the existing findings are inconsistent. On the one side, research shows that formal programs are as effective as informal ones (e.g. Linehan, 2001). However, on the other side, it was found that for example informal mentoring relationships prove greater outcomes for individuals as compared to those who participate at formal mentoring programs (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Eby, Butts, Lockwood, & Simon, 2004; Eby & Lockwood, 2005). This may be due to the nature of informal and formal mentoring which differ in terms of formation (spontaneously derived versus matched mentors and protégés), duration (three to six years versus one year) structure (non fixed meetings and activities versus predetermined frequency and locations for meetings) and purpose (evolving goals over time versus fixed goals from beginning) (Blake-Beard, 2004). Thus, participating in formal mentoring program might be useful as one of the many sources of support, but may prove to be less effective if it is the only source of support. Furthermore, women engage in more formal networking activities than men but have less career advantages (Hetty van Emmerick, Euwema, Geschiere, & Schouten, 2006). Therefore, formally established mentoring and networking programs may provide psychosocial support for women but much less instrumental or career advancement support. However, this may not be surprising given than career sponsorship resulting from interpersonal relations rather
occurs in an informal and natural context. Formalizing may therefore not be enough to achieve its purpose of advancing careers.

Initiatives such as work-life balance programs and mentoring programs have been identified by women as the most important but not exclusive criteria to advance. However, their effectiveness has yet to be proven. Work-life balance programs facilitate women to have both family and career but the career path of women who have progressed vertically seems to largely follow the traditional linear career path of men. Furthermore, formal networks and mentoring programs may not be as instrumentally effective as those that happen in a natural context because other factors (such as affection) which may be important for the relationship may be harder if not impossible to be formalized.

CONCLUSION

Despite the negative and often deterministic perspective of women in management literature, women have made a leap considering their short history of active participation in managerial positions. Women make around 40% of the total workforce and 5% of top management positions in the world and it is estimated that it will still take three quarters of a century in order for women to achieve parity with men in management positions (Catalyst, 2007). First, to expect that perceptions about men’s and women’s role which have long existed and persisted, disappear after a few generations because an increasing number of women are working professionally may be unrealistic. Changes should be done gradually and on an individual level by first bringing awareness to individuals -- both men and women on the existing and implications of biased perceptions.

Second, although proponents of women push for organizational changes to improve women’s conditions, paradoxically, they hold a constant pessimistic view in which women
are wedged in a deterministic situation. Therefore, rather than focusing on how women are frustrated due to “glass ceiling” phenomenon, research should explore on the ways women can integrate into the informal male-dominated networks. For example, the importance of networks and mentors has been underlined, but none to our knowledge has attempted to understand the networking process. If an individual wants to meet the right person who can support his/her career development and advancement and thereby be more easily integrated in informal networks, it may crucial to first understand the dynamics and the process of networks. As a result, women may overcome the homophily phenomenon which largely dictates interpersonal relations. Consequently, an increasing number of women will be able to join the high levels of management, no longer be considered as tokens, and achieve what men in powerful positions once have aspired.
REFERENCES


Antonakis, J., Angerfelt, M, and Sivasubramaniam, N. 2005. When they were good they were very good indeed but when they were bad they were horrid! Biasing effects on ratings of leadership. Paper presented at Women as Global Leaders Conference, Dubai, UAE.


Fortune. 2007. Women CEO Fortune 500. Fortune Magazine


FIGURE 1
Pyramidal representation of women’s career

Source: Breaking through the glass ceiling (Wirth, 2001)
FIGURE 2
Person-centered and organization-focused perspectives embedded in social and institutional contexts

Social & institutional context (derived from cultural values, histories, ideologies)

Social-system factors: gender-roles and stereotypes

Organization centered perspective:
- Organization enforces stereotypes
- Organization practices e.g. performance evaluations, training
- Interpersonal relations, e.g. networks, mentors

Person centered perspective:
- Managerial traits
- Line experience/competences
- Career aspirations

Interpersonal relations, e.g. networks, mentors

Organization enforces stereotypes
FIGURE 3
Accessing dominant “old-boys networks” through mentors

“Old boys” network

Strong ties
FIGURE 4
Men’s and women’s career path model

[Diagram showing men's and women's career paths with 'Men’s career path' and 'Women’s career path' labeled.]